

The desirableness of dying a righteous 28
Man's Death.

49.64 A
SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN,

NOVEMBER 1703.

At Saint JAMES's Chappel.

NUMBERS 23. 10.  the latter part of the verse.

*Let me dye the death of the righteous, and let my last
end be like his.*

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THE SECOND EDITION.

Publish'd by Her MAJESTY special Command.

London: Printed and Sold by H. Hills, in Black-fryars, near
the Water-side. For the Benefit of the Poor. 1707.



NUMBERS 23. 10. the latter part of the verse
*Let me dye the death of the righteous, and let my
 last end be like his.*

WHat *Balaam*, whose words these are, precisely meant by them, and whither, as some learned Men suppose, [*Grot. in loc.*] he had respect in them only to the temporal promises of the Jewish Law, by which good Men seem to have been secur'd against violent and untimely Deaths, is not very material here to enquire. It is enough, for my present purpose, that that holy Spirit, by which *Balaam* spake, may be very reasonably presum'd to have had a much larger and nobler prospect, a much higher meaning and intention, in them; and that, according to the natural and unforced sense of the words themselves, *to dye the death of the righteous* must signify to dye, exactly in the same circumstances and condition, in respect of death consider'd purely as death, in which a righteous Man dyeth: and to have our *last end like his* must either signify the same thing with *dying his death* (Death being frequently call'd in Scripture Man's last or latter end) or else it may farther denote our undergoing the same sentence at the day of Judgment, and having the same lot and portion that he shall (the word, which we here translate last end, signifying sometimes the final issue and event, the ultimate result and upshot of things, as also the wages and rewards of them.) But it is needless to contend which of these senses shall take place, since in reality and effect they are both the same, and do virtually and implicitly comprehend each other. For he, and none but he, who *dyeth a righteous man's death*, shall have a righteous Man's judgment, and be partaker in a righteous Man's rewards.

The entite sense then of this wish may be briefly
 summar'd

sum'd up in these following words. O may it so happen to me, that, when I come to dye, I may both in the hour of my death, and in whatever is to come after it, fare just so as the righteous Man shall.

The words thus explain'd offer me a fair opportunity, of enquiring

First, Why it is such a desirable thing to *dye a righteous Man's death*,

Secondly, How they ought to live who expect and desire so to dye, and

Lastly, Of earnestly exhorting you all to use your utmost endeavours, so to live, that ye may not fail of so dying.

First, Why it is such a desirable thing to *dye a righteous Man's death*: and for this the Scriptures have given us abundance of very plain and convincing Reasons, viz. because *the end of that man is peace; he hath hope in his death; Mt. 37. 37. to him to dye is gain; 'tis to be present with the Lord, Prov. 14. 32. to be with him in Paradise, Phil. 1. 21. to be comforted in Abraham's bosom, &c.* that is, in other words, to be immediately admitted into a very great and glorious State of Happiness, *Luk. 23. 43. 16. 22.* and, if not the very greatest of all (which probably shall not be enter'd upon, till after the general judgment) yet a sure and infallible pledge of that, a state only inferior to that. Death, which we are all apt to be so much afraid of, and which to the unrighteous Man is indeed a King of terrors, is to the righteous Man not terrible at all. But, under what notion soever we consider it (whether as it is our leaving this present World, as it is a separation of our Souls and Bodies, or as it is our entrance upon a new and unchangeable state of things) it can never come too soon, or be an unacceptable and welcome guest to such an one.

First, Let us consider it, as it is our leaving this present World, a place so dear to the generality of Mankind, that they think it impossible they can ever make too much of it, or cling too fast to it. A place, which they

cannot bear so much as the thoughts of leaving, without the utmost regret and reluctancy imaginable, much less can actually take their leaves of, without becoming all over amazement, horror and distraction. A place which they must be even violently forc'd and torn from against all their strongest inclinations and affections, or which, if they do seem to give up at last, it is only because they cannot help it, and find it invain to struggle for it any longer.

But, blessed be God, the case is quite otherwise with the righteous Man: He has been taught and convinc'd from the very beginning of his life, at least of his spiritual life, that he was not to expect here an abiding city, but to look upon himself as a Pilgrim and a Stranger, liable to be summon'd hence to his Father's house in a far distant Country, at an hour when perhaps he may not think of it, nay, it may be, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, without so much as the least warning, in the midst of his health, and in the flower of his Age.

And accordingly, he has made it his great care not to set his affections upon this world or the things of it, but to wean and take them off from them, as much as possibly he could; to live above them, and to sit loose to them; to use the World indeed, but not to abuse it, knowing that the fashion of it passeth away.

He has been mindful likewise of setting his house in order, and disposing his worldly Affairs so, that they may not trouble him, when he cometh to dye. He has, with infinite satisfaction, repos'd every thing, that is most dear to him here, in the arms of God's wise and good Providence, and cast all his care upon one, who he is sure, careth for him. And, as for that spiritual work, which God had givin him to do here, he has long since made that his chief concern and business. He has been careful to work in the day, well knowing that the night would come, when no man can work; he has finish'd his course, he has kept the faith: his loyns are girded about, and his

with lights burning : and he himself is as one waiting for
his Summons out of this World, in which, if God so
thinks fit, he has nothing more to do.

Besides, he has all along liv'd under a right notion
and apprehension of this present World ; as of a place,
where a Man may be sure that he shall meet with a great
deal of solid and substantial trouble, but little, very
little, true and real pleasure ; a place full of snares and
temptations for good Men, where they are always in
danger, without the utmost caution, of making ship-
wreck of their vertue and hope of salvation, and where
consequently they have been forc'd to converse, with
much fear, jealousy, reservedness, restraint and unea-
siness ; a place, where not improbably he has been ill
us'd, and persecuted for his righteousness sake : at least,
where he has been put to it to make his way, with much
difficulty, thro' the oppositions and contradictions of
Sinners, and where, by dwelling amongst such, he has
had his *righteous soul vex'd, from day to day, with seeing
and bearing their unlawful deeds.*

But, above all : he is possess'd with a firm and unshak-
en belief that, whenever he shall be taken out of this
World, he shall be translated into another infinitely
more happy and desirable : that Death shall not put an
end to his being, or deprive him of all his pleasures and
enjoyments, but that it shall only change them for such,
as are unspeakably better : and that he shall have a rich
amends made him in the Life to come, for those few
valuable things, such as good Friends, Relations, &c.
which he has been forc'd to leave behind him in this
World.

And what now can any Man see, in this Character
of the righteous Man, that should incline him to believe
that his departure out of this World will be in the least,
terrible or uneasy to him ? surely it is much more rea-
sonable to conclude from it, that such an one will, as it
is express'd in the book of *Job, rejoice exceedingly, and be
glad when he can find the grave,* when he can have leave

to retire from this Sink of Sin and Misery, and to gain a peaceful and secure retreat, within those blessed Religions, where all his cares, all his fears, and all his dangers shall cease together : where his time of Tryal and Probation shall be happily over, the high prize of his calling secur'd, beyond all danger of loosing it again, and his Rewards already begun, in a very glorious, tho' improving, State of pure and endless Felicity.

Secondly, Let us consider Death, as it is a separation of our Souls and Bodies ; two dear companions you'll say, that have long liv'd together in so close and intimate an union, that, for this fifty or threescore years or more, perhaps, they have never been so much as one moment absent from each other. And must these part at last ? certainly this must needs be a very sad and melancholly parting. A sad parting, no doubt, to them, who have wholly or chiefly, given themselves up to bodily pleasures, and liv'd altogether a Life of flesh and sense, and never had any true relish of a rational, spiritual and divine Life ; and who consequently, when they put off their bodies, must necessarily put off all hopes of Happiness with them. But, by no means sad to a righteous Man, who has made it his constant business to *keep under his body and to bring it into subjection*, to live *abstractedly and spiritually*, and to *have his conversation in Heaven* ; and who, by so doing, has fitted and prepar'd himself for that pure and spiritual Life, which he knew he must enter upon, as soon as ever he should be stripp'd of his body. Nay, so far from sad to him, to whom his Body has been all along a troublesome and ungovernable Subject, a mighty clog and hindrance to all the affairs of his Soul, a perfect prison and restraint to it, and the cause of innumerable temptations, pains, difficulties and disorders ; that it is utterly inconceivable to reason, that he should not be very well pleas'd to be releas'd from it : to be set free at once from all these evils and uneasinesses, and to be put into a full and perfect liberty of pursuing the natural aims and desires of his Soul,

Soul, without any, the least, let or interruption, for evermore. Besides, even in meer kindness to his body, he cannot but be willing to part with it; because he knows assuredly that his parting with it, for a little while, will be for its infinite gain and advantage: and that, after a short time, he shall receive it again for ever, so spiritualiz'd and refin'd above what it was, that it shall never more be any trouble or incumbrance to him. He lays it down, in a sure and certain hope of its Resurrection to Life again, when, tho' it was *sown in corruption*, it shall be *rais'd in incorruption*, tho' it was *sown in dishonour*, it shall be *rais'd in glory*, 1 Cor. 15. tho' it was *sown in weakness*, it shall be *rais'd in power*, tho' it was *sown a natural body*, it shall be *rais'd a spiritual body*, tho' it was once *mortal*, it shall now have *put on immortality*.

Lastly, if we consider Death, as it is our entrance upon a new and unchangeable state of things, we shall be so far from finding it unacceptable to a righteous Man, upon this account: that, to use the Apostle's words, this is his hope, his joy, his crown of rejoycing. He can easily acquiesce and be contented, under the other two notions of death, but in this he perfectly exults and triumphs; nay, it is this which mainly supports and comforts him, under the two. And who indeed can forbear triumphing over death, that knows it to be to him only a short dark passage into everlasting glory? That knows it to be the gate of Paradise, tho' a little strait, and narrow and difficult to pass thro'; and the entrance into such Joys, 'as eye never saw, ear never heard, and such 'as are too big for the heart of man to conceive? *Revel.* '7. 16, 17 21. 4. Oh blessed place! *where* 'all tears 'shall be wip'd from our eyes, *where* there shall be no 'more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall 'there be any more pain: *where we shall* hunger no more, 'neither thirst any more, neither shall the Sun light on 'us, nor any heat (nothing which may be in the least troublesome or inconvenient to us) but we shall partake of a 'fulness of joy, *and of rivers of pleasure*, at God's

'right hand for evermore. Blessed God ! who would not gladly exchange this world, even tho' it were much more desirable than it is, for such a transcendently happy state as this ? Who would not rather part with ten thousand bodies, if he had them, than be excluded from this glorious and blisful Place, into which flesh and blood cannot enter. Oh ! who can possibly fear death, with such an Heaven as this, at the end of it ? Who would not even long and desire thus to dye away into everlasting life ?

But here perhaps some Men will be apt to say, that it is an easy matter to make Harangues, and say fine things, in the Theory, of the righteous Man's fearlessness and contempt of death ; but how doth this matter really stand in fact ? Doth our experience convince us that good Men, when they come to dye, are so perfectly indifferent and unconcern'd, so full of peace, and hope and joy, as we have represented them ? Or rather, doth it not convince us that many, that pass with us for good Men, seem to be as timorous and apprehensive of death, and to hanker after and be as fond of life, as other Men ? And what account can we be able to give of this ; or how can we make it consistent with what has been already said upon this head ? To this I answer,

First, That the very highest things, which I have any where said in this Discourse, of the righteous Man's fearlessness and contempt of Death, and of his peace, and hope and joy in it, have been many times actually exemplify'd in the deaths of good Men. Witness that Noble Army of Martyrs, who more cheerfully resign'd their Lives, and their Judges and Executioners could take them from them ; who, in the midst of their health and strength and all other Circumstances that might make life desirable, voluntarily offer'd themselves to death, nay even courted it and sought for it, as an high privilege and peculiar happiness ; and who, in the midst of the most lingering, painful and tormenting kinds of death, held out with the most undaunted courage and reso-

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resolution, and at last expir'd, in smiles, in hymns of thanks and praise to God, in raptures and ecstasies. And, least this should be thought a very extraordinary case: Witness all those many pious Souls, within our own knowledge (more especially within ours who are Ministers of the Gospel, and whose business it is to attend upon sick and dying persons) who have declar'd to us, both in word and deed, upon their death beds, their entire willingness to leave this present world, and inexpressible joy and comfort which they felt in the hope and prospect of a better. And, if this be not always the case with those, that appear to us to be righteous, there are, doubtless, very good reasons to be assign'd for it, which will not in the least derogate from that power, which I have attributed to Righteousness, of arming us against the fears of death, nay and even making it easy and comfortable to us. As

First, That we are often mistaken in our accounts of Men, and take those for righteous, who, upon a very slight observation, outwardly appear to us to be so, who yet perhaps are guilty of such secret sins, as make them know themselves to be far otherwise. And then it is no wonder if these Men, when they come to dye, are very much disturb'd and uneasy, upon account of those sins, which, tho' hidden from the eyes of all others, are so very legible to their own Consciences. And this must needs appear very odd and strange to us, while we are ignorant of the true cause of it, but answers it self, as soon as ever rightly understood.

Secondly, That among those who really are, generally speaking, good Men, there are but few, very few, that are so good as they should be. But few, that do what they can and ought, to take of their affections from this world, to make up their accounts with it, and prepare themselves for their departure out of it. But few, that lead lives pretty much abstracted from flesh and sense, and use their utmost endeavours, to give their minds the most deep and lasting Impressions, which they are able,

or

of the future and invisible things of another World. And, this being so, it cannot possibly be otherwise, but that they must sometimes be surpriz'd and disorder'd by death; but then this is apparently their own fault and not any deficiency in Righteousness or Religion, whose Rules had they but strictly follow'd, as they might and ought to have done, they would not be, upon their Death-beds, in that hurry and confusion, that concern and trouble, in which they too often find themselves. And this Consideration should make us all, even the very best of us, extremely careful to think of, and live under a constant and habitual preparation for, death, in the time of our health and strength; that so we may be always ready, at what time soever our Lord shall call us, and have little else to do, than to resign our Souls into the hands of God, as into the hands of a most faithful Creator.

Thirdly, This very often happens from bodily melancholy, which is apt to make good Men think a great deal worse of their spiritual State and Condition, than they really deserve, and so to fill them with unreasonable and groundless Fears, Jealousies and suspicions concerning them; or else from the Distempers which bring them to their Death-beds, which frequently so dispirit and enfeeble them, that they seem to have lost all manner of heart and courage, and to be even troubled and uneasy: and these, which are only natural indispositions, some Men are very willing to misconstrue moral ones; or it may be from their concern for their poor families, who are like to loose their main, if not only, humane stay and support in them, and to be put to very great straits and difficulties, when they are gone; or lastly from the impressions which, at such a time more especially, the grief of their dearest friends and relations, which is so plainly to be heard and seen all about them, is apt to make upon them (a cruel and unseasonable kindness this, in our friends, I must observe by the way, however well meant, thus to discompose our thoughts,

thoughts, and divide our affections, which ought now wholly to be set Heaven-wards : thus to catch at us, and hold us fast, when we must of necessity be going : and, by so doing, to make this last tug and conflict of nature, in which, God knows, they ought much rather to assist than hinder us, still more and more difficult.) But the same answer will serve to all these, *viz.* either that these are accidental Circumstances, not necessarily belonging to death, as death, and so do not fall within our present consideration : or, that, so far as they are necessary, they take advantage of the weaknesses and infirmities of good Men, and make them seem to own such a fear of death, as they themselves, in a sound state of mind, would utterly detest and abhor.

Lastly, After we have said all that we can, there is such a natural aversion in Men to death, resulting from that intimate union, which is between our Souls and Bodies, as it will be extremely difficult to suppress and conquer so far : that there shall appear no manner of regret and reluctancy, even in good Men, when they come to dye. Nature will struggle to the last, even whither we will or no, and this struggle of hers may look something like an unwillingness in good Men to dye, when it really is not so ; as is plain from the declarations of good Men themselves who, under all this struggle and conflict of nature, do frequently profess an entire willingness to be dissolv'd, and, as far as such a troublesome conflict will permit, give proof of the sincerity of these their professions, by all the outward expressions of contentment, joy and satisfaction, that can in reason be expected. Even St. Paul himself, who *earnestly desir'd to be dissolv'd, and to be with Christ*, yet was so apprehensive of some sort of trouble, that he must undergo in putting off his body : that he wish'd that he were not to be *uncloth'd, but cloth'd upon, with that house which is from Heaven.* 2 Cor. 5. 4. Nay, and in our blessed Lord himself, at the near approach of his death (which yet we are sure he was perfectly resolv'd upon, satisfy'd in, and pleas'd with) his

his humane nature seem'd to shrink and draw back a little, and made him pray to his Father that, *if it were possible, that cup might pass from him.* Matt. 26. 39. Two plain proofs that we must not judge good Men to be fearful and unwilling to dye, only because we see some sort of struggling and reluctancy in them, as death draws near: these being very often the pure effects of nature, and by no means signs of the inward sense and desires of their Souls.

The sum of all then is this: either that what Men are apt to think a fearfulness and unwillingness in good Men to dy, is not really so, or that, if it be, yet that it is not upon account of death, consider'd purely as death, but upon account of some peculiar unhappy outward Circumstances, that attend it, and help to make it more terrible, than, in it self, it would be: or else that it proceeds from bodily distempers and infirmities: or lastly, that it is owing to a want of that due strictness and exact care of our Lives, which Religion requires at our hands. And that, to whatever other cause it may be imputed, it can never be imputed to any want of power in Righteousness or Religion to arm us against these fears, and to make us more than conquerors over this King of Terrors.

I proceed to enquire.

Secondly, How those Men ought to live, who expect and desire to dye a righteous Man's death; and the answer to this is very plain and short, that they must live a righteous Man's life. That they must live *soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world, and keep a conscience void of offence towards God and towards Man*; and especially that they must frequently exercise themselves in those Duties, which have a more immediate tendency to fit and prepare them for death, such as *Self-denial, Mortification, Retirement, Heavenly mindedness, Prayer, reading good Books, &c.* And that no other way but this will do is evident, because all the joys and comforts of a righteous Man upon his Death-bed; and all his happiness after

after death, are the natural and judicial effects and consequences of his good Life. *Peace*, as the Prophet *Isaiah* well observes, *is the work of righteousness; and the effect of it quietness and assurance for ever.* Isa. 32. 17. Because the righteous Man hath accustom'd himself to despise this world, to live above it, and to be a stranger to it, therefore can he, with great ease, part with it. Because he has understood the worth and excellency of the Soul, above that of the Body, and has led a spiritual Life, and has chiefly delighted in and valu'd spiritual Pleasures; therefore can he put off his body, without any great unwillingness, and go with joy and comfort into the world of Spirits. Lastly, because he hath made it his constant care to behave himself so, upon all accounts, as he knew would render him most acceptable to God, and intitle him to the blessings of another life, promis'd by his Son Jesus Christ, in the Gospel; therefore can he enter upon this new life, with the greatest cheerfulness and alacrity imaginable, with *joy unspeakable and full of Glory.*

And, for the same reason, because the wicked Man has all along plac'd his utmost hope and happiness in this World and the things of it; therefore can he not ever be willing to leave it, but must be even forc'd and torn, with violence, from it. Because he has accustom'd himself to relish none but bodily pleasures, and has never had any right tast or apprehension of spiritual ones, therefore will he dread the thoughts of being stripp'd of his belov'd body, and becoming all Spirit, that is, according to his notions of things, all misery: Once more, because he has liv'd so as to have provok'd God, and to have drawn upon himself all the miseries of that future State, threatn'd against Sinners in the Gospel; therefore must he necessarily dread the entring into this future State: this State to him, of certain and everlasting Woe and Torment.

As well then may we expect to *gather grapes from Thorns, or figs from Thistles*, as the comforts and blessings of a righteous Man's death, from an unrighteous Man's life.

life. No, the natures of all things, nay even of God himself, must be first chang'd; the promises and threatenings of the Gospel must be quite alter'd, and made directly contrary to what they now are; Causes must produce effects, not only not like themselves, but the most different and unlike that possibly can be. Contradictions must be all reconcil'd, absurdities all vanish: Light must become Darkness, and Heaven Hell, before this can possibly come to pass.

I deny not but that an unrighteous life, may possibly end well and comfortably at the last, in an happy Repentance; I mean such a Repentance, as has been begun some considerable time, before our Death, and has given us, by its repeated good fruits, reasonable hopes and assurances of its having been sincere, and having wrought a thorough change and amendment in us. But as for a Death-bed Repentance (whatever uncovenanted mercy God may have in store for it, which, tho' we shall not take upon us to limit, yet we are sure it cannot become sinners to presume upon: or however we may be forc'd sometimes to advise Men to it, as the best thing which they can do, when they have brought themselves to this miserable shift) yet thus much we may safely say of it, that it cannot possibly give us the peace and hope and joy of a righteous Man's death; and that, for two very substantial reasons, both because we cannot be sure that a Dead bed Repentance shall be accepted of God, altho' it be sincere: and because, tho' we were sure of this, yet it is impossible for us, in this World, to be sure of the sincerity of it.

O let us then all make hast to repent, in our health and strength, while there are hopes, that we may live to see the habitual effects of our Repentance, by which alone we can be able to judge of its sincerity, and consequently its availableness. And, if we are not so happy as to be of the number of those righteous Persons who need no Repentance; yet at least let us be of the number of those happy penitents, *who turn to the Lord, while*

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he may be found, and who, finding him, shall find in him every thing that their Souls can thirst after or long for. But this belongs properly to

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My third and last Head, under which I am to exhort all Men to use their utmost endeavours so to live, that they may not fail of *dying a righteous man's death*. And, for this purpose, I have but just time to put you in mind, that you cannot live with any tolerable ease and contentment even in this world, nor enjoy the pleasures of it, such as they are, to the best advantage, without having first taken care of this. For the fear of Death is a most slavish fear, and will all our lives long keep us in bondage, will mingle with and embitter all our Pleasures, take off the edge, and spoil the relish of all our Enjoyments. That the way to live long is to live so, that we may not fear Death, it being the fear of this which inflames and heightens all our Distempers, and very often kills us, when they would not. That, when we come to dye, we shall stand in the utmost need of all the joys and comforts of Religion to support our faint and drooping Spirits: that we shall then be willing to purchase them, at any rate, whereas they are now easy to be had: and, oh dreadful reflection! that they will not then be to be purchas'd, even tho' we were able to give the whole world for them. And that, after death (supposing that we should repent upon our Death-beds) it is highly improbable that our Repentance will avail us any thing; and, if not, we must be utterly lost and undone forever, *Oh that men were wise, that they would think upon these things, that they would consider their latter end.* Deut. 32. 29.

And so most Men will be apt to tell us that they do, and that, tho' they are at present engag'd in the ways of sin, yet they fully design to draw off in time, to find a place for Repentance, and so to bring all right at the last. And truly I am very apt to believe, that most wicked Men do so design. But what reason then, in God's name, can they give, why they should delay so much

much as one moment, to put this wise and important design in Execution ; Why they should not make all the hast, that possibly they can, to give themselves the unspeakable comfort and satisfaction of living without the fear of Death ? Why they should leave this most grand and momentous of all concernments, to innumerable hazards and uncertainties, and not instantly secure it ? Oh ! how much wiser can they be, in matters of infinitely lesser value, how seldom do they act thus, in their worldly Affairs ?

I shall conclude all with the advice of the Son of Sirach Ecclus. 18. 21, 22. 14. 13, 14. 5. 7. 14. 12. — *Humble thy self before thou be sick, and in the time of sins, shew repentance. Let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vow in due time, and defer not till death, to be justify'd. Do good before thou dye, and according to thy ability, stretch forth thy hand. Defraud not thy self of the good day, let not the part of a good desire over pass thee. Make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day : for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroy'd, and perish in the Day of Vengeance. Remember that death will not be long in coming, and that the Covenant of the Grave has not been shew'd unto thee.*

God grand that we may seriously lay these things to heart, and learn to live every day, more and more to his Glory, and our own eternal Salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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